



BOOK  
CLUB KIT



A NOVEL

JOAN

KATHERINE J. CHEN



# A LETTER FROM KATHERINE J. CHEN

Dear Reader,

A few years ago, when I told another writer what my current project was about, he scoffed: “There are literally thousands of texts on Joan of Arc. What could you possibly have to say about her?”

His skepticism had the opposite effect of what he perhaps intended. It did not dampen my resolve to write on Joan—far from it. But it did startle me, and if I had been prepared to argue with him in the moment, I would have said the following:

“Because no great work on Joan of Arc exists. Because she is one of the most elusive of elusive historical characters. Everyone knows of her, yet no one truly knows her. They just think they do. Because, in remembering the icon and the martyr, we imagine her forever in the fire, and we forget the young woman full of life, who rode war horses, who led an army, who frightened the encroaching English until they believed that so long as she was alive, they would not win again in battle. And though we picture a girl in armor, we do not acknowledge, whether because of misogyny or limited imagination, what a girl can do in that armor. I want to change that. I want to change how we think of Joan of Arc and, in doing so, how we think of women and the power that women wield.”

So, for me, it does not matter that other books on Joan of Arc exist. I am glad they exist because without them, I would not have been provided with the sheer plethora of research and information on not only Joan but also the Hundred Years’ War, the Late Middle Ages in France and England, and all aspects of living in such a dark, chaotic time. I would not have been able to comb through this research and reimagine from various texts, anecdotes, and testimonies the Joan that appears—and I hope lives and breathes—within these pages.



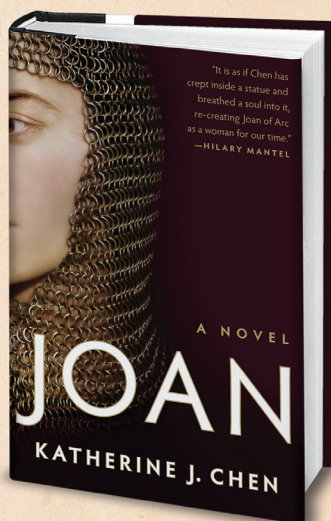


You may ask, what does Joan mean to me? Well, I would share with you that Joan appeared to me at a very low period in my life when I had just been laid off from a job, and therefore lost health insurance at a time when I needed it most. I would tell you that in the process of rewriting this book from scratch, I was diagnosed with cancer and underwent months of treatment and, at the end of it all, I found Joan patiently waiting for me at the desk where I write (in my mother's closet). As I began to write, this book became the reason I got out of bed every day until I finished. I know Joan's energy was there the whole time. It is the kind of energy that can brave self-doubt and diminish pain. This energy is, of course, faith.

Few would doubt that we live in a time of turbulence and uncertainty. So I do not say this lightly when I offer you Joan as a palliative to the sense of hopelessness and anxiety that sometimes prevails within our current society. As readers and lovers of books, you already know the power of the written word. And Joan embodies so much of what the world needs today: courage, kindness, hope. In a world populated with small men and small minds, with endless bickering and circumlocutory politics, Joan's energy and humanity are no less than redemptive. This is what I have tried to capture in this book.

My hope is that readers of all ages will be inspired by her, will know her in a new and poignant way that does justice to her legacy, not simply as a globally recognized figurehead, but as a flesh-and-blood young woman of immense and immeasurable courage who embodied so much of what it means to live a life of purpose and of action. And I hope she will feel closer to you as a result: no longer standing on the stone pedestal we have carved for her but near enough to give you strength to pursue your own greatest dreams.

Thank you so much for reading.  
Sincerely, Katherine





## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How much did you know about Joan of Arc before you started this novel? How did the book align with or subvert your expectations?
2. Though Joan of Arc is arguably one of the most famous Catholic saints, Chen's Joan is a largely secular reimagining. What did you think of this approach? How do you perceive Joan's status as a saint after reading the book?
3. Discuss Joan's relationship with her father and how it does or doesn't evolve over time. What do they have in common? What are their biggest differences?
4. How does little Guillaume's death affect Joan throughout her life? What does he come to symbolize for her?
5. "Since her birth, she has never known a time of peace," Chen writes of Joan. "Like it or not, she is always thinking about the war." How did the circumstances of Joan's birth and childhood influence who she becomes? Do you think she would have been just as interested in war if she hadn't grown up surrounded by it? Why or why not?
6. How do Catherine and Joan protect each other? What, besides a sister, does Joan lose when Catherine dies?
7. "She wonders: Why is it so hard to say what I can do? Why, if I possess strength, must it also be bound up in holiness?" Why do you think the court, the soldiers, and the general public need to believe Joan's strength is a divine miracle? Do you think society is still guilty of this type of thinking, when it comes to exceptional and/or powerful women? Explain your view.
8. How do other women characters in the novel wield power and influence? How do these differ from the way Joan uses hers? Which approach do you think is more successful, and why?
9. How does Joan's perception of her uncle Durand change over time—especially after her reunion with her father? What did you make of this character?
10. When does Joan's relationship with the Dauphin start to sour? Do you think there was a way for Joan to avoid her fate—and the eventual trial and execution that followed? Why or why not?



## JOAN OF ARC: INTERESTING FACTS

- Joan was injured at least twice in battle: The arrow to the shoulder—or, by some accounts, between the neck and shoulder—at Orléans (which she pulled out herself), and crossbow bolt to the thigh at Paris.
- In the trial after Joan's capture at Compiègne, there were approximately 70 charges brought against her, from sorcery to horse theft. Eventually those were reduced to 12, most of which were related to her wearing men's clothing and her claims that God had contacted her directly.
- According to one of Paris's most sought-after hairdressers in the early 1900s, Monsieur Antoine, Joan inspired the popular bob haircut requested by silent film stars and flappers—which remains popular today.
- Joan was famous for her “volatile temper.” According to History.com, she scolded prestigious knights for swearing, indecent behavior, and dismissing her battle plans; called her noble patrons spineless, and once tried to slap a Scottish soldier who had eaten stolen meat.
- Over two decades after Joan's death at the stake, Charles VII ordered a new trial and cleared her name.
- Pope Benedict XV canonized Joan as a saint in May 1920.
- St. Joan of Arc's Feast Day in the Catholic Church is May 30.





# JOAN OF ARC: INTERESTING FACTS



- Joan has been portrayed onscreen and on the stage by numerous actresses, including Milla Jovovich, Leelee Sobieski, Ingrid Bergman, Gemma Arterton, Condola Rashad, Sybil Thorndike, Imogen Stubbs, and many more.
- Christine de Pizan, one of the leading poets of the period, composed a poem about Joan. Alain Chartier, another poet of the time, called Joan a “she-warrior” in a letter.
- After her death, an impostor lookalike of Joan, supported by Joan’s brothers, cheated people of money.
- The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris contains over 20,000 books on Joan.
- George Bernard Shaw, famous for his play *Pygmalion*, wrote a play about Joan titled *Saint Joan*. It was this play that secured his Nobel Prize win in 1925. In his introduction to the work, he wrote of Joan, “She could coax and she could hustle, her tongue having a soft side and a sharp edge. She was very capable: a born boss.”
- Joan, while having a taste for men’s fashion, supposedly did not care that much about food. Bread dipped in wine was apparently enough sustenance after partaking in battles.
- Some famous writers who have portrayed Joan in their work include Mark Twain (who wrote a whole novel on Joan), Voltaire, Shakespeare, Bertolt Brecht, and Jean Anouilh.
- Joan allegedly performed a miracle when a dead infant was presented to her. When she took the child, the baby breathed again and was quickly baptized before dying.





# CINNAMON SUGAR PALMIERS



## INGREDIENTS:

- 16 oz. frozen puff pastry (2 8 oz. sheets)
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp. ground cinnamon
- Pinch of kosher salt (optional)

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Defrost puff pastry sheets according to package instructions.
2. Whisk together sugar, cinnamon, and salt.
3. Generously dust work surface with sugar mixture. Place one puff pastry sheet over sugar. Generously coat top of puff pastry with sugar mixture. Use a rolling pin to roll dough to a 16×10-inch rectangle.
4. With the longer end facing you, fold in the sides towards the middle. Coat exposed puff pastry with sugar mixture. Fold the sides towards the middle once again. Coat exposed puff pastry with sugar mixture. Fold the right side over the left side. Coat exposed puff pastry with additional sugar mixture.
5. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Repeat folding process with second puff pastry sheet.
6. Cover assembled logs with plastic wrap. Freeze for 30 minutes, or up to overnight.
7. Remove frozen logs from freezer. Using a sharp knife, slice logs into ½-inch-thick cookies. Place sliced cookies on parchment-lined baking sheet. Cover with plastic wrap. Freeze for 1 hour until solid.
8. NOTE: At this point, once frozen, you can store sliced cookies in an airtight container and keep frozen for up to a month. Bake as directed.
9. Preheat oven to 375°F. Arrange frozen palmiers on parchment-lined baking sheet (or silicone mat-lined sheet) about 2 inches apart. Bake for 15–18 minutes, rotating midway, until sugar has caramelized and puff pastry is golden brown. Transfer to wire racks and let cool completely in the pans. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days.